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President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mungra (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 42

Assistance in mine clearance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/53/496)

Draft resolution (A/53/L.28)

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Austria to introduce draft resolution A/53/L.28.

Mr. Sucharipa (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. In addition, the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated country, Cyprus, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area — Iceland and Liechtenstein — align themselves with this statement.

The agenda item under discussion today, "Assistance in mine clearance", focuses our attention on the humanitarian tragedy of the use of anti-personnel landmines. Every year, these mines maim or kill more than 20,000 people, particularly women and children and those living off the land. Peacekeeping, peace-building and rehabilitation and reconstruction in post-conflict situations are often rendered extremely difficult by the presence of anti-personnel mines. The devastating social, economic and environmental impact of anti-personnel mines and their detrimental effects on the creation of conditions conducive to sustainable development is well documented.

Although the overall ratio between newly laid mines and mines cleared has somewhat improved, in some areas continued use of these weapons sometimes renders mine-clearance efforts almost futile. We are still confronted with the fact that millions of landmines are scattered through more than 60 countries and that efforts to clear these mines are frustrated by the laying of new mines.

Significant human and financial resources are being devoted by the international community to assistance in mine action. An integrated and holistic approach, including the development of national mine-action capacities by affected countries, mine awareness programmes and victim assistance, should allow for effective and efficient demining programmes. The newly coined expression "mine action" stands for this endeavour.

The primary responsibility for mine action lies with the parties responsible for the laying of mines. The extent to which the international community should be called upon to provide assistance in mine action must take into account the capacity of the parties involved to take on

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these obligations themselves. In this regard, the commitment to renounce the use of anti-personnel mines is of particular importance.

We have witnessed several important developments in the field of mine action in recent months. The European Union welcomed the opening for signature in Ottawa on 3 and 4 December 1997 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and the efforts made by its signatories to promote universal accession to the Convention. We are pleased that more than 130 countries have now signed and that the Convention will enter into force on 1 March 1999.

On the eve of the Ottawa Conference, the European Union Council of Ministers adopted, on 28 November 1997, a new Joint Action on anti-personnel landmines, in which the Union reiterates its commitment and establishes a common moratorium on the production and transfers of anti-personnel landmines. All European Union member States shall take appropriate steps to comply with the objectives of the Ottawa Convention pending its entry into force and undertake to participate actively in the conferences to be organized after the signature of the Convention. In addition, the Union shall seek to promote, in all appropriate forums, including the Conference on Disarmament, all efforts likely to contribute to the Joint Action objectives.

The European Union looks forward to the entry into force on 3 December 1998 of the amended Protocol II to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. It calls upon all States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Convention and the protocols attached thereto, and in particular to the amended Protocol II.

Assistance in mine action, including mine awareness, training, surveying, mine detection, mine clearance and victim assistance, should be guided by the principles of national ownership, sustainability and capacity-building. Substantial resources are needed to realize our goal of a world free of anti-personnel landmines. The Union believes that, in order to allocate and use more efficiently the resources made available in the fight against anti-personnel landmines, improved international coordination is essential. The Union supports the central coordinating role of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian mine action worldwide and welcomes the creation of the United Nations Mine Action Service, as well as all efforts to achieve a more coherent response within the United Nations and beyond to the challenge posed by the many millions of anti-personnel landmines.

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General, in which he outlines the challenges posed by the scourge of landmines as well as the United Nations response to these challenges. We underline our support for the activities of the United Nations Mine Action Service and for the policy developed by the Secretary-General in the annex to his report, entitled "Mine action and effective coordination: United Nations policy", which encapsulates the key principle on which United Nations mine action is based and clarifies the roles and responsibilities within the United Nations system.

The European Union continues to commit important resources to the international mine-action effort. The European Union Joint Action on anti-personnel landmines sets out the framework for specific actions and financial contributions by the Union to mine action. From 1993 to 1997, the Union contributed $140 million to mine action. This amount does not include individual contributions by the European Union member States. In 1998, the Union plans to increase its already considerable efforts by earmarking another $60 million for mine action. This makes the European Union the world's major donor in this area as well. It is in this spirit that the Union confirms its intention to continue working actively to promote the efforts of the international community towards the complete elimination of anti-personnel landmines.

In conclusion, let me, in the name of the European Union and all other co-sponsors, introduce the draft resolution entitled "Assistance in mine action", contained in document A/53/L.28. I would announce additional co-sponsors at this stage: Bangladesh, Colombia, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Ukraine and Vanuatu. We hope that this draft resolution will receive the broad support it merits and will be adopted by consensus. That would provide a clear indication of the international community's commitment to dealing effectively with the issue of mine action.

Mr. Jayanama (Thailand): On behalf of the Thai delegation, I wish to commend the Secretary-General for his report on assistance in mine clearance. This comprehensive report provides a valuable survey of the pernicious problem of landmines worldwide. It also presents a useful overview of mine action currently being

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pursued under United Nations programmes and by related agencies, as well as the remaining tasks required of us before this deadly scourge can be eliminated once and for all.

As a mine-affected developing country, Thailand understands all too well the terrible toll anti-personnel landmines take on individuals and on societies, in our own and in neighbouring countries. While neither a producer nor an exporter of landmines, Thailand nevertheless suffers acutely from the problem. Landmines infest 797 square kilometres of Thai territory, affecting 17 border provinces of the country. Our people did not sow these seeds of death and disability, yet they have borne the consequences in terms of life and limb, livestock and property.

In the past, Thailand tried to address the landmine problem on its own, using its own personnel and drawing upon its own resources. The Royal Thai Army has been able to remove about 2,500 to 3,000 mines per year along the border and has also extended itself to assist mine-clearing activities in other affected countries. We are pleased to have provided active assistance in demining efforts in Cambodia, bilaterally as well as multilaterally, through the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia. In 1992 and 1993, we despatched two Thai engineering battalions into Cambodia to clear landmines on Route No. 5 from Poipet to Battambang, providing a safe return home for hundreds of thousands of Cambodians. They have now been reintegrated into and are taking part in everyday life in Cambodia. These encouraging results have strengthened even further our commitment to the cause of combating landmines, not only in South-East Asia, but throughout the world.

Thailand joins the international community in its efforts to strengthen international cooperation on mine action. We are proud to be a signatory to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction, signed in Ottawa last December. We are particularly satisfied that the Ottawa Convention has provided a legal framework for international assistance, since the tasks of banning landmines and rendering assistance to mine activities continue to be a heavy burden for mine-affected developing countries with limited financial and technical resources. For the fact is that it costs less than $10 to plant a landmine, but more than a hundred times as much to clear one. In this context, we strongly believe that concerted international efforts should not be confined to the banning of landmines, but should also include financial and technical assistance to mine-affected countries, specifically for mine clearance and humanitarian assistance to victims and survivors of landmines.

Domestically, Thailand is in the process of creating a legal and institutional framework that complements international efforts on mine action. We have taken the necessary legal steps to speedily ratify the Convention and hope to obtain Cabinet approval this month, which would enable us to attend the first meeting of the States parties to the Ottawa Convention, scheduled to be held in Maputo in May 1999. Our draft mine-action plan includes demining training, the destruction of anti-personnel landmines in our stock and the elimination of anti-personnel landmines in the ground within 10 years. This is expected to be considered and adopted by Thailand's National Committee on Anti-personnel Landmine Management this month.

But as always, such intensive efforts will require more than putting in place the necessary mechanism. In terms of personnel, demining and stockpile destruction will require about four battalions and three companies of army and marine engineers. The budget for these activities alone is estimated at about 1 billion baht, or $27.4 million, for the Thai military authorities and police combined. If we include mine awareness activities and assistance for victims of landmines, which are being incorporated into this comprehensive mine-action plan, it is evident that mine action is an extremely costly undertaking, particularly for a developing country in economic crisis such as Thailand.

While assistance from donor countries remains important, national efforts must be encouraged. At the International Forum on Demining and Victim Assistance, held at Phnom Penh in October this year, Thailand made clear its position that the most viable long-term solution to the landmines problem lies in capacity-building, so that mine-affected countries can become effective and self-reliant in clearing landmines. Thailand is pleased that the Cambodian Mine Action Centre has played a very active role in this regard. For its part, Thailand is also in the process of establishing a Thailand Mine Action Centre and looks forward to forging strong bilateral, trilateral and multilateral cooperation with our partners and the international community in providing technical assistance to mine-affected countries.

We also believe that an international focal point should be created to coordinate all mine action by the United Nations and its agencies. At present, United Nations efforts to address landmines fall under the

Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Thus, a mine-affected country can receive landmine assistance from the United Nations only if that country is also a theatre of United Nations peacekeeping operations. Thailand is of the view that, in order for all mine-affected countries to obtain United Nations assistance on landmines, regardless of whether or not peacekeeping operations are present, the issue of mine action should come under the framework of humanitarian assistance, which is, after all, what mine action is all about.

The issue of landmines is another reminder that the international community still has some way to go before it can protect the innocent from suffering in the wake of war and conflict. The efforts under way to rid the world of landmines are encouraging, but they will have to be sustained through the commitment of all concerned. Thailand pledges to do its utmost, by itself and in conjunction with its partners and the international community, to ensure that the fields and jungles of South-East Asia are made safe from landmines for the sake of our own and future generations.

Mr. Konishi (Japan): We are pleased to note that in the course of the past 12 months, the international community has made progress in establishing a legal framework for the prohibition of landmines. The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction was opened for signature in Ottawa on 3 December last year, and Japan became the forty-fifth contracting party when it presented its instrument of acceptance to the United Nations on 30 September this year. The Convention will enter into force on 1 March 1999. The fact that 133 countries have signed and 50 have ratified the Convention in less than a year reflects a recognition on the part of the international community of the urgent need to tackle the problems caused by landmines. On the other hand, a new treaty is now under consideration in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva that would prohibit the transfer of anti-personnel landmines. Japan intends to make further contributions to the effort to open negotiations.

It has been estimated that even if we assume that no new mines will be laid, it would take many decades at the present pace of clearing 100,000 landmines a year to complete the job. That the landmine is an inhumane weapon is clear, as it maims and kills indiscriminately. Its victims are often civilians, and the weak and poor are always the hardest hit. In fact, one of every five victims is under 15 years of age. I should like to take this opportunity to mention that Japan is going to host in Tokyo this week a symposium on children and armed conflict with the participation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Olara Otunnu.

Landmines not only cause inhumane suffering, but also hinder peace-building, as they remain hidden even after peace accords are drawn up. A recent report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees referred to the landmines placed in cars and wells by the withdrawing Serbian forces in Kosovo, which hindered returnees trying to resettle. United Nations and other humanitarian personnel on the ground are often denied passage to their destinations due to mines, to which they themselves have also sometimes fallen victim.

In the long term, the existence of mines, or even the fear that they lie hidden in the ground, prevents the farmer from working his field. They deprive him of his livelihood and prevent his community as a whole from achieving economic development and prosperity.

Thus, mines not only inflict inhuman suffering upon innocent people but also obstruct peace and reconciliation. Moreover, they hinder economic and social development. My delegation would like to join others in supporting and sponsoring the resolution just introduced by the representative of Austria, entitled "Assistance in mine action".

To tackle the complex problems related to mines, initiatives have been taken in different countries. In our view, the international community is at the stage now when it must actually take concrete action, while at the same time pursuing effective coordination of the efforts already in progress. The assumption of mine-action responsibilities by the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, in order to enhance coordination, is a step forward. Japan intends to make financial contributions to the United Nations Mine Action Service to build its capacity to carry out its coordinating function.

Last month Cambodia convened at Phnom Penh a meeting on mine action, the International Forum on Demining and Victim Assistance. Since some of the outcomes of that meeting are useful in examining the concrete steps to be taken, I should like to take this opportunity to share them with the Assembly.

The Forum was held with the participation of 10 mine-affected countries, 18 donor countries and 11 international organizations, as well as 10 non-governmental organizations, and was hosted by the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) in cooperation with the Government of Japan. CMAC was originally set up under the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia and was subsequently transferred to the authority of the Government of Cambodia. The main purpose of the Forum was to provide mine-affected countries with an opportunity to learn from the experience of CMAC. Therefore, it is an example of South-South cooperation, or, to put it in another way, triangular cooperation. It was agreed in March last year at the Tokyo Conference on Anti-personnel Landmines that the maximum use should be made of this form of cooperation, which we believe is quite effective. The most significant results of the Phnom Penh Forum included the following.

First, participants in the Forum reconfirmed the importance of ownership by mine-affected countries, and their partnership with the international community in conducting mine action activities. National ownership means mine-affected countries should strive to build up their capacity to deal with mine problems in a sustainable way by making mine action a key component of their development plans. In other words, demining, for instance, should be linked to the development and reconstruction of the mine-affected countries.

Secondly, delegates spent one day at the CMAC training centre viewing demonstrations of its mine-action capabilities. Discussions in the Forum indicate a willingness on the part of mine-action centres in different countries to exchange information. It was suggested that worldwide mine activities would be served best if a focal point were designated.

Thirdly, it emerged from the discussions at the Forum that the goal of mine-action activities was not to clear mines but to reduce the risk caused by mines, so that people could engage in normal activities in their communities. When the ultimate goal is "zero victims", risk reduction and area reduction, that is to say, identifying areas where mines are not laid and liberating them for farming, are as important as mine clearance itself.

Fourthly, it was suggested that it was crucial for any mine-affected country to be capable of sustaining any technology provided to it, that the technology must arrive along with the capital needed for both evaluation and eventual operation and that we should be cautious of an over-commercialization of mine-action activities.

Finally, regarding assistance for victims, it was suggested that a holistic and social approach was needed, including vocational training and provision of employment opportunities.

Japan sincerely hopes that meetings such as the Phnom Penh Forum will provide a model for how the international community, and particularly mine-affected countries, can cope effectively with mine problems by engaging in information-sharing and cooperation. As we stated at the Ottawa Convention Signing Conference, Japan will extend approximately 10 billion yen, or $80 million, over the five years beginning in 1998, in support of mine clearance and victim assistance. I should like to take this opportunity to announce that this year Japan will make a financial contribution of $2.12 million to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund in support of United Nations mine action.

As the twenty-first century fast approaches, we must redouble our efforts in mine action so that we do not bequeath an earth contaminated by landmines to the next generation. In this last decade of the twentieth century — late, but better than never — awareness has grown of the seriousness of the problem and the need to take action to reduce the damage that landmines inflict. We must now step up our cooperation in order to put our ideas into practice.

Ms. Clapp (United States of America): The United States places great importance on the draft resolution before us today, "Assistance in mine action". We deplore the terrible legacy of modern warfare, these hidden killers that destroy people's lives and livelihoods. We are committed to bringing this to an end. Although the landmine crisis continues to loom large, in the past year much progress has been made.

First, let me congratulate Canada for the ratification by more than 40 countries of the Ottawa Convention, which will enter into force in March 1999. Although the United States is not yet able to sign the treaty, our commitment to global humanitarian demining is one of the longest running. Not only are we working with the international community to realize our shared goal of a world where landmines do not threaten civilians, we have been a leader in bilateral assistance to mine-affected countries. The United States currently supports demining

assistance programmes in 24 countries, with more under consideration for next year.

Last October, Secretary of State Albright and Secretary of Defense Cohen launched President Clinton's Demining 2010 Initiative, seeking to eliminate the threat of landmines to civilians by the year 2010. In announcing this ambitious goal, we recognized that two factors would be critical to its success. First, the international community would have to join together to coordinate its efforts on a much greater scale than we have yet seen. Secondly, it would require an annual investment worldwide on the magnitude of $1 billion, or roughly five times what the world was spending on demining at that time. In both respects, we have made major strides over the past year.

Several major international conferences, hosted by Japan, Canada, Germany, Norway, Denmark and the United States, have been coordinated and designed to develop a solid roadmap for proceeding towards the goal of 2010. We now have a remarkable degree of international consensus on what needs to be done, how to do it and how to organize ourselves to do it.

The United Nations has become the focal point of international coordination for mine action. We applaud the formation of the United Nations Mine Action Service to serve this purpose. We also applaud Norway for convening the Mine Action Support Group, comprising the principal 20 donor Governments to support the United Nations Mine Action Service and promote coordination between the United Nations and major donor Governments. That Group met yesterday for a very productive meeting, reinforced by participation by experts from capitals.

Through the efforts of the United Nations Mine Action Service and the donor Governments, a number of international efforts are already under way. The Mine Action Service has completed assessments in a number of mine-affected countries, and an international consortium of non-governmental organizations will soon begin level-one surveys in those countries. Switzerland has established the International Centre for Humanitarian Demining in Geneva, to serve as a central repository for information gathered under United Nations coordination and to provide a link with mine action centres in mine-affected countries. This will help the international community set priorities for mine clearance and coordinate activity on the ground.

Developing new ways to engage the private sector in humanitarian demining is a critical part of the United States effort. Our Government has been working with a number of private partners to use their creative talents and resources to help conquer the landmine problem. Several noteworthy projects are already under way. With its Adopt-a-Minefield programme, the United Nations Association of the United States has developed an important new model for public-private partnership, working hand in hand with the United Nations. The Australian Government has recently announced its Destroy-a-Minefield programme, and we commend it for this vital new activity. This year, our oldest public-private partnership, between the Department of Defense, DC Comics and the United Nations Children's Fund resulted in a mine-awareness comic book in Spanish, featuring Superman and Wonder Woman for the children of Central America, where the United States works with the Organization of American States in mine clearance. This is a follow-up to the successful Superman mine-awareness comic book for the children of Bosnia, which was produced earlier. The next project of this sort will be a Portuguese-language comic book for Mozambique and, eventually, Angola.

Similarly, the Marshall Legacy Institute has initiated a canine corps in collaboration with the Humane Society of the United States, the United Nations Development Programme, DC Comics and the Department of State. Designed to expand the use of dogs in mine detection, the canine corps promises to develop into a major programme worldwide, supported largely by private resources. As we know from experience in Afghanistan, dogs have proved more effective than humans in mine detection under many conditions.

We hope the success of these examples will encourage similar efforts in other countries to bring more private resources into humanitarian demining. We believe that a significant infusion of private resources will be required to reach the goals of 2010 and the Ottawa Convention.

In the end, it will take everyone's help to end the threat landmines pose to innocent civilians. Without sufficient resources and coordination, anti-personnel landmines will continue to maim and kill innocent civilians, prevent refugees from resettling and returning home and inhibit the productive use of fertile land. This social, economic and humanitarian scourge must be stopped.

Ms. Matlary (Norway): Anti-personnel landmines are weapons of terror. The Norwegian Government shares the deep concern of the world community with

respect to the use of anti-personnel mines in conflict areas. The primary victims of these mines — there are still tens of thousands of victims every year — continue to be unarmed civilians, particularly children and women. Anti-personnel landmines have devastating effects by making large areas in many countries inaccessible for decades. In countries such as Angola, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Bosnia and Mozambique, mines represent a serious obstacle to the process of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. They are a threat to human security.

The Ottawa Convention to ban the production, transfer and use of anti-personnel mines in many ways broke new ground. It was inspired and carried forward by means of a new diplomacy in a partnership between States, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. This partnership provides the needed platform from which to address the landmine problem in an integrated, multifaceted and comprehensive manner. Mine action constitutes a set of interrelated activities, including risk-reduction measures, such as mine awareness and mapping, as well as humanitarian demining, rehabilitation and assistance for the reintegration of victims.

We welcome the Secretary-General's comprehensive report to the General Assembly on assistance in mine clearance and the attached United Nations policy document on mine action and effective coordination. The report indicates that the spirit of the Convention will serve as a guideline to mine-action activities. The Convention will enter into force on 1 March next year. That is in itself a remarkable achievement. The first meeting of States parties, in May, will be a significant political manifestation which will strengthen the universalization of the Treaty. In this regard, the Government of Norway urges countries that have signed the treaty to ratify it as soon as possible.

For more than 10 years Norway has been active in mine-action activities around the world, both through the United Nations system and through bilateral programmes involving non-governmental organizations such as Norwegian People's Aid. At the Signing Conference in Ottawa in December last year, Norway made a commitment of contributing $120 million over a five-year period to mine action. We are prepared to work closely with the United Nations Mine Action Service and the United Nations organizations within their respective areas in responding to the humanitarian challenges, both in terms of cooperation on specific matters and as regards strategic questions relating to the humanitarian provisions of the landmine Convention. Although priority is given to funding mine-action programmes in countries that are committed to the objectives of the Convention, exceptions will be made on humanitarian grounds.

As we speak, massive efforts to rid the world of these indiscriminate weapons are being undertaken in the field by the United Nations, by other international organizations and by national institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations. However, both the inputs and outputs of our work need to be further improved through increased efforts regarding coordination at all levels, data-gathering systems, transfer of competence and further strengthening of national capacities, rehabilitation and reintegration of landmine survivors, effective use of existing technology and further development of new technology and constant development of methodology and standards.

At the international workshop in Ottawa on mine-action coordination earlier this year there was widespread support in favour of the United Nations as the focal point for global mine action. Consequently, we welcome the establishment of the United Nations Mine Action Service as a means to strengthen coordination within the United Nations system, while also serving as a focal point in the international arena for mine action. We urge that sufficient and predictable funding be provided to the Mine Action Service for its coordination role. The need to develop national ownership and strong national coordination and to build sustainable national capacities will continue to be important as well. New technology in demining is also needed, a technology that will have to meet the requirements of the end user in being affordable, appropriate and accessible.

A prerequisite for good coordination is to have a clear picture of the current status of the landmine problem. The Norwegian Government is of the view that more resources will have to be allocated to activities which will result in well-documented information. Data-gathering is therefore crucial. The assessment missions undertaken and planned for next year by the United Nations, the establishment of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, and the Survey Contact Group established by major mine-action non-governmental organizations, as well as the Landmine Monitor initiative of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines are important tools in that respect.

The holistic approach outlined in the United Nations international survey standard presented by the Mine Action Service, and the statement of principles for survey activities by the Survey Contact Group, fall well within

our conception of a template for how survey operations can be conducted. The template must be flexible in order to be applicable to the wide range of scenarios in which mine-action programmes are implemented.

In addition to identifying the consequences of anti-personnel landmines, the survey reports must be accompanied by comprehensive plans of action containing a list of priorities and the costs attached. Such information should be made available to all actors involved in mine action and is to be channelled through the Mine Action Service in order to secure coordination and continuation.

Although we see a need for further development of demining technology, we want to point out the risks inherent in funding research and development at the expense of neglecting mine action conducted with present technology. The techniques and methodology the deminers use today have an important effect on thousands of lives in mine-afflicted countries around the world, so this activity must go on at an unimpeded pace.

The need for special attention to the victims of anti-personnel mines, from rehabilitation to effective long-term social and economic reintegration, is of particular importance. This has been explicitly recognized in the Ottawa Convention. However incomplete the information is, we know that the needs are enormous. Only through a concerted approach will we be able to assist those whose lives have been so tragically altered by the use of landmines. There is a growing awareness by the international community that the global landmine crisis has far-reaching consequences and thus requires a multifaceted and integrated response. The key now is to move from a general discussion to setting priorities and to ensuring the best possible use of available resources for sustainable action at the country level.

Ms. Wensley (Australia): Australia remains determined to achieve a comprehensive and lasting solution to the global landmines problem. The conclusion of the Ottawa Convention banning landmines was a major step towards the achievement of a global ban on landmines, and my Government looks forward to ratifying the Convention as an original State party by the time it enters into force next March.

Obviously, however, this is not the end of the story. As all have stated, further work is needed, given the vast numbers of landmines still in the ground and still being laid, and the fact that a number of countries central to the landmines issue remain outside the Ottawa Convention.

Australia will continue to work with others to secure the establishment of complementary negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a ban on landmines transfers. Such a ban, if adopted by major traditional producers of and traders in landmines that have not signed the Ottawa Convention, would represent another important step forward.

Australia has also ratified the amended landmines Protocol — Protocol II — to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. We continue to encourage all States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Convention and to the amended Protocol. We are active in promoting adherence to the amended Protocol in our own region, particularly by those States not in a position to adhere to the Ottawa Convention.

Demining also remains a priority for the Australian Government. To achieve the objectives of our aid programme, with its unambiguous focus on poverty alleviation, demining will be particularly important in some countries. At the same time, scrutiny will be applied increasingly to existing and proposed programmes to ensure their appropriateness, their effectiveness in reaching those most in need and their progress in enhancing local capacity.

We have spent around 35 million Australian dollars on mine action in recent years, and we have committed ourselves to spending $A 100 million by the year 2005. Our demining assistance is focused on four of the countries most heavily affected by mines and unexploded ordnance, namely, Cambodia, Laos, Angola and Mozambique. In addition to this direct demining assistance, Australia continues to address some of the broader problems exacerbated by the presence of landmines. For instance, Cambodia is a major recipient of Australian food aid — food that is required partly as a result of arable land being heavily mined, as just described so graphically by the representative of Japan.

Most of Australia's assistance is for direct mine-clearing activities. This includes support for surveys and clearance using detectors, sniffer dogs and, to a limited degree, mechanical clearance devices. Australian Defence Force personnel have also provided demining assistance to a number of countries. This year we will provide a core contribution to the United Nations Mine Action Service to support its key role of coordination. It is crucial that donor activities be properly coordinated and matched with the priority needs of communities. It is important also that the Mine Action Service have enough

resources to ensure that effective surveys are carried out to establish the location of mines and the priority areas for demining; that communities be educated about the danger of mines; that new technology be developed to speed up the demining process; and that the victims of mines receive the treatment and the rehabilitation that they need. We must work energetically and collectively to ensure that the pleasingly expanding pool of donor resources for demining and related activities is coordinated in a way that maximizes the impact in the field. In that respect, I endorse absolutely the statement by the representative of Norway on the subject of coordination.

The ultimate goal of Australia's demining assistance is to build local capacity in affected countries to implement and, above all, to sustain demining programmes. We recognize that the achievement of this goal requires a long-term commitment, particularly given the fact that many of the most heavily mine-affected States have been weakened institutionally and financially, often through years of conflict. This goal of sustainability for Australia's assistance is realized through support for both institutional and technical development within counterpart organizations, initial support for recurrent costs, the provision of appropriate technology and, finally, very careful targeting of our technical assistance.

Landmines are a long-term problem for many, many countries and while foreign technical inputs are often crucial in the formative stages of demining programmes, it is vital that processes be put in place from the very earliest stages of programmes to build and to empower local organizations to manage their own demining programmes as soon as possible. Lessons also need to be learned about the best ways to increase the awareness of communities living in mine-affected areas. Particular focus needs to be given to reaching the most vulnerable groups in communities in danger. It is Australia's view that, in the search for better outcomes, none of these important elements of effective demining programmes should be overlooked.

It is also our view that we cannot become complacent, believing that all that can be done is being done. There will be a continuing need to review and to refine our approaches, to coordinate better, to target more effectively and to search for new, better-adapted technology. On this last subject, Australia is very pleased that the new technology that we originated is now helping speed up the rate of demining in Cambodia, in Bosnia, in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Moreover, in order to keep up the momentum and to maintain the flow of resources necessary to render minefields inactive and to assist with the rehabilitation of their victims, public interest must be maintained. As the representative of the United States noted a few moments ago, Australia recently launched its own Destroy-a-Minefield programme. Through that programme, community groups, schools, businesses and associations will all be able to participate directly in solving the landmines problem by sponsoring active minefields which have been selected by the United Nations as having a high priority for clearance.

Initially, the Australian Destroy-a-Minefield programme will use money from the Princess Diana Trust Fund, and then the Australian Government will contribute an additional matching amount to the fund. We are going to select an Australian non-governmental organization to implement and administer the programme. That organization will in turn seek sponsors in the Australian community to raise the necessary funds to clear the adopted minefields. Sponsors will raise funds in their respective communities to clear the adopted minefield and return the land to local populations for productive use. Every two Australian dollars raised by sponsors will be matched by one Australian dollar from the Trust Fund. By our calculations, this will create a potential contribution of $A1.2 million. This is not unique; it parallels similar programmes elsewhere. But our sense is, and the response that we have had to date indicates, that this is a very practical way in which to engage the community and carry forward the objectives we are setting ourselves here in the United Nations.

To end on an optimistic note, the magnitude of the landmines problem needs to be kept in perspective. Although we all know that the problem is immense, it is not insurmountable. What is required above all is a well coordinated, concerted effort both by donors and by Governments in mine-affected countries. In the future, as in the past, our efforts must be guided by our determination to maximize the practical impact of our contributions. We must move away from discussion about process and focus on outcomes. It is only if we do this that we will be able eventually to say that there are no longer any victims of landmines, and that we will be able to reach that goal in years, not decades.

Mr. Al-Haddad (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The conclusion and signature of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their

Destruction was a milestone in the efforts of the international community to put an end to the human suffering caused by the widespread use of these indiscriminate weapons that make no distinction between combatants and non-combatants. These weapons claim a high toll among innocent civilians, among them women, children and elderly people. They have the potential to harm people, land, the environment and development long after a conflict has ended.

Agreement on the Convention was a result of the international determination to find a solution to the human tragedy resulting from the use of anti-personnel landmines. The Convention goes beyond temporary measures by seeking to tackle the root causes of the problem; it addresses the needs of victims, who have undergone enormous physical and psychological suffering because of these landmines. The Republic of Yemen is proud to have been among the States which participated in the Ottawa process when it began in 1996; it was also among the first States to sign the Ottawa Convention in 1997 and among the first 40 States to ratify it. This reflects the Republic of Yemen's cognizance of the humanitarian dimensions of this tragedy and of the suffering of the many peoples and nations affected by landmines.

Yemen has long suffered the destructive consequences of mines that were laid in large and diverse parts of its territory. The Republic of Yemen has made its own modest efforts by putting in place a programme for the clearance of anti-personnel landmines. But lack of material, technical and human resources has hampered the completion of that programme. Here, we underscore the reference in the ninth preambular paragraph of draft resolution A/53/L.28 to provisions of the Convention recognizing that States parties in a position to do so should provide assistance for mine-clearance and related activities, and for the care and rehabilitation and social and economic reintegration of mine victims.

The Republic of Yemen also welcomes United Nations efforts to strengthen the mine-clearance capacities of States, especially those where mines pose a serious threat to the safety, health and lives of local populations. Therefore, we stress the importance of developing national mine-clearance capacities. In this context, we reaffirm the provision of paragraph 2 of the draft resolution urging all Member States and regional organizations which have a capacity to do so to assist mine-affected countries in the establishment and development of national mine-clearance capacities. We also endorse the view which stresses the importance of regional organizations and relevant bodies of the United Nations system undertaking the promotion of awareness of landmines, especially among children.

My delegation believes that the efforts of the United Nations system and of the regional organizations concerned will not be effective unless the Secretary-General has the support he needs in the form of comprehensive technical information and adequate financial resources to enhance the role of the Organization in eliminating all remaining landmines. This should include raising public awareness, training, follow-up and monitoring with respect to the clearance and disposal of landmines. There is also an urgent need to provide technical assistance for mine clearance and to develop appropriate technologies.

In this regard, the delegation of Yemen expresses its gratitude to the Government of the United States for its assistance in setting up a programme to search for and clear landmines. The problem persists, however, because of large, heavily mine-infested areas in our country. These areas are topologically varied, and accurate data and precise statistics are still lacking. This calls for an intensive joint minefield surveying, mine-identification and mine-clearance capability that is beyond Yemen's capacity.

In conclusion, the momentum created by the imminent entry into force of the Convention now that the legal procedures are in place should prompt the international community to eliminate stockpiles and clear those mines that have already been laid, in accordance with the Convention. We are committed to making the necessary efforts in signing this Convention early. We are determined to continue these efforts with a view to the attainment of the objectives of the Convention.

Mr. Pérez Otermin (Uruguay) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The role of the United Nations in effectively coordinating assistance to clear anti-personnel landmines is growing year by year, indeed minute by minute, since by ensuring efficiency in this area we will be able to prevent many deaths in various parts of the world. We are particularly grateful to the Secretary-General for his detailed report on mine clearance (A/53/496), which paints a clear picture of the challenges facing us in this area.

Uruguay has from the start supported the proposals made by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his report entitled "Renewing the United Nations: A programme for reform". In that report, he proposes that to ensure better

coordination, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations should assume responsibility for mine-clearance activities.

My country also joined in the determined efforts leading to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

Regrettably, mined fields continue to pose a serious threat in almost all areas of the world, and thus mine clearance is an important part of the post-conflict rebuilding of societies. Uruguayan contingents in the United Nations have had to deal with these weapons, but basically we are concerned at the regrettable effects of these mines on women and children, who are being mutilated or killed as a result of this hidden, slow-acting weapon of mass destruction.

We fully support efforts to convert our region into the first one in the world to declare itself free from this scourge. The goal laid down by the Organization of American States in a resolution entitled "The Western Hemisphere: A Zone Free from Anti-personnel Landmines", dated 1996 and 1997, for us a priority objective. At the subregional level, we are pleased to note the political declaration of the Southern Cone Common Market, MERCOSUR, plus Bolivia and Chile, which was adopted on 24 July 1998. In that declaration, the Presidents of our countries agreed to move towards establishing our region as a zone free from anti-personnel landmines.

We would like to thank the Government of Mozambique for its excellent initiative in proposing that the city of Maputo host the first meeting of the States parties to the Ottawa Convention. This is a source of great pleasure to us, and we look forward to the entry into force of this Convention on 1 March.

Finally, we would like to express our support for the draft resolution on assistance in mine action, which will be adopted today by the General Assembly and which we are co-sponsoring, and we would like also to reaffirm the need to strengthen the assistance of the international community in this task.

Mr. Babaa (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*interpretation from Arabic*): My country attaches great importance to the item on assistance in mine clearance, which we are considering today. We are very pleased to see the General Assembly consider this important item for the sixth time. This proves that the international community realizes the danger posed by mines as a slow-acting weapon of mass destruction which affects about 70 States around the world.

At its last five sessions, the General Assembly recognized the seriousness of this problem. Furthermore, the entire world has stressed that these anti-personnel landmines not only pose a threat to thousands of people, but also create serious ecological and socio-economic dangers that impede sustainable development in States affected by landmines.

In this connection, I should like to thank the Secretary-General; the Organization itself and its specialized agencies, in particular the United Nations Development Programme; other international bodies; and many States for their efforts to eliminate anti-personnel landmines. We would, however, reaffirm the need for the international community to make its firm commitment to this cause comprehensive, continuous and strong.

The Secretary-General, in his report contained in document A/53/496, describes the various aspects and dimensions of this problem. He states in paragraph 204 that

> "As the United Nations mine action evolves, however, the suffering in mine-affected countries continues. A lack of resources is not the only reason that programmes are hampered. Lack of political resolve also frustrates the humanitarian objective of mine action."

Starting out from this premise, lack of political resolve contributes to the suffering of the affected countries, which, since most of them suffer from underdevelopment and poverty, do not have the necessary resources to develop their local capacities to create comprehensive demining programmes. Foremost among such programmes are assistance for technical training, databases, information exchange and new technologies. They need also to be able to treat victims, rehabilitate them and reintegrate them into society, and to effectively manage their resources with a view to attaining these objectives.

The international community has made serious efforts to rid itself of landmines. The most recent of such efforts was the signing of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. However, that Convention overlooks an important aspect, namely the responsibility of the

colonialist Powers that laid the mines in the territories of other States. A number of international and regional organizations have recognized the responsibility of those States which planted the mines and the possibility of their paying damages for those actions.

For example, the Organization of African Unity, at its ministerial meeting in Harare in May 1997, stressed the moral responsibility of the countries that laid mines during the Second World War and during the colonial wars. It called upon them to set aside a reasonable portion of their military budgets for demining and to provide needed information, technical assistance, maps and assistance to victims. The final communiqué of the summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, held in Tehran last December, called upon the developed countries to provide major demining assistance and to give the affected countries advanced technical equipment to aid in this work. Moreover, the final communiqué of the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Durban, South Africa, contains a paragraph that deplores the use of mines to terrorize civilians. It notes that mines prevent civilians from working their land, thus contributing to famine among civilian populations, and prevent them from returning to their homes. This runs counter to international law and international humanitarian law. The Non-Aligned Movement's final communiqué includes a statement by the heads of State or Government expressing their concern about the consequences of the Second World War, especially the landmines that had been left and were still killing people, causing material damage and impeding the development plans of some of the non-aligned States. The heads of State or Government called upon the countries responsible for laying those mines outside of their territories to shoulder their responsibilities, cooperate with the affected countries through the provision of needed information, maps to locate mines and the necessary technical assistance for demining. It also called upon those countries to contribute towards the cost of demining and to pay compensation to the affected countries for all the damage done by those mines.

Libya has long suffered and continues to suffer from anti-personnel landmines because of what was done on our territory by the belligerent countries during the Second World War. During that time millions of mines were laid in large expanses of our territory and in that of our neighbours. The matter is complicated by the fact that the fighting and troop movements on our territory involved both Axis and Allied forces. One cannot imagine the huge number of mines which both of them laid, in order to impede the movement of one side or the other during combat operations. These mines caused many thousands of deaths and permanently disabled many others among the civilian population. That situation has also impeded the development process in our country, especially in railroad-building, land reclamation, exploitation of natural resources, exploration for oil and combating desertification. Many United Nations reports have alluded to these facts.

More than 50 years have elapsed since the end of the Second World War. One side was victorious, one was defeated. Both the victorious and defeated forces have left our country. But their mines, bombs and explosives remain behind, buried in unknown areas in the Libyan desert, hidden by rocks and sand. From time to time these mines explode in the faces of innocent children at play, or of a peasant woman gathering food or of an old person who lost his or her way to his house or tent. People have lost their lives, their eyesight, their hands and their feet.

This tragedy goes on and on, creating more and more innocent victims, because the Libyan authorities do not have the necessary maps and information showing where those mines were laid. Throughout several decades, Libya has repeatedly tried to deal with this problem, and we have made some progress. But the lack of maps and expertise has hindered our efforts, although some of the countries that laid the mines have provided us with maps and information. But this has not been enough.

I am pleased to be able to tell the Assembly that last July Italy and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya concluded a detailed bilateral agreement for demining in Libya. First, it provides for direct action between the two countries through bilateral and international cooperation for the removal of mines left from the Second World War. Second, the Italian Government has also agreed to organize special courses for the training of special units for demining. Third, assistance will be provided for treating victims at specialized medical centres in Italy. Fourth, in cooperation with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, a medical centre for prosthetics will be established. Fifth, compensation will be paid and assistance rendered to victims. Sixth, contributions will be made towards humanitarian projects to assist families of the disabled and other affected persons. Seventh, there will also be cooperation for the ecological development of affected territories. Eighth, a joint Italian-Libyan fund will be established to finance the rehabilitation of affected areas,

the training of demining specialists, the treatment of affected citizens and the establishment of health centres in Libya to treat landmine victims. This agreement between Libya and Italy sets an outstanding precedent. We hope that the other two countries that laid mines in Libya during the Second World War — namely, Germany and the United Kingdom — will follow Italy's example and conclude similar agreements with my country, thus helping the Libyan authorities put an end to this problem and compensate our people for the damage of the last 50 years.

This outstanding Libyan-Italian initiative could also be an example for many countries throughout the world. The countries that have sold, produced or used landmines in their wars in other countries — be they regional or global wars — all of these countries have a historical responsibility to compensate for their deeds and to generously contribute to the efforts of the United Nations and the international community to rid the world of this problem once and for all.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Ortega Urbina (Nicaragua) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, as well as the Dominican Republic.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/53/496. It shows the extent of the landmine problem and the surprising number of unexploded landmines silently awaiting victims in more than 60 countries.

The indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines every year causes the mutilation and death of thousands of people, especially children and women, in all the regions of the world. These mines disrupt the economies, production and infrastructure of the countries that have the misfortune to suffer from this problem. This makes it difficult to establish the necessary conditions for reconstruction and development in areas that have been affected by conflict — thus prolonging during peacetime the effects of the war.

Mines can be sown quickly and at a ridiculously low cost. It is now possible to buy a plastic mine, smaller than a compact disc, for the modest sum of $3. It does not require any technical knowledge to place thousands of them in a few hours. However, detecting and removing them, even with the use of sophisticated techniques, may take several years and often costs more than developing countries can afford.

Individuals who survive the explosion of a mine, especially children, are often left seriously wounded and permanently incapacitated. They may lose one or both legs and suffer terrible injuries, and the shrapnel from the explosion may cause blindness. A child amputee needs a prosthesis, which is often difficult to obtain in a developing country, and in many cases a new prosthesis is required every six months. Many of these children suffer shame and diverse psychological problems because of their incapacity. Rehabilitation is costly and often inadequate. According to the figures of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in El Salvador and Nicaragua only 20 per cent of child victims of a mine explosion have received adequate care.

Consequently, mine-clearance programmes are intended to save lives, to prevent future suffering and to restore natural resources for production and recreation.

We must also enter the sphere of preventive action; we must raise the consciousness of people who live near areas affected by these deadly weapons. We must find the best way to increase preventive knowledge about mines in these endangered communities. And we must pay special attention to the most vulnerable groups, such as women and children.

These consciousness-raising programmes on the problem of mines are essential because of the increasing number of accidents affecting both unprepared civilian populations and experienced relief workers. This can happen primarily for three reasons. First, people do not know where the mines are located. Secondly, even though they may be aware of the presence of mines, people lack the knowledge needed to minimize the risks. And, finally, though people may be aware of the presence of mines and know how to reduce their effects, frequently, out of necessity, they go on with high-risk activities, such as collecting firewood and tending grazing animals.

Mine clearance is a constant concern of the international community and of the countries affected due to the magnitude of this landmine crisis. Since 1993 the General Assembly has been considering this question, and recently, in order to better coordinate the actions of the United Nations system, the responsibility for all questions and activities in the area of mine clearance — including

the management of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance — has been transferred to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the United Nations Secretariat. In this way we will be able to continue to take an integrated approach to the various aspects of mine-clearance activities, an approach that reflects the close interrelationship between the various aspects of a country's recovery process — namely, between the maintenance and consolidation of peace, the reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons, the revitalization of communities, assistance to victims and reconstruction and development. We congratulate the Secretary-General on this well-conceived step.

In Central America, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), with the assistance of various donor countries, have been carrying out an essential humanitarian mission since 1992, complementing national efforts and financing and planning programmes to clear mines laid in the 1980s, when the region was a setting for civil wars. These programmes are developing, although much remains to be done due to the magnitude of the problem.

In its mine-clearance programme in Central America, the OAS has planned to use trained dogs to sniff out explosives and otherwise help in these operations. The dogs were recently brought to Honduras, where Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan and Costa Rican sappers are being taught how to handle them. This programme will have to be redesigned because of the damage caused by hurricane Mitch.

In the area of prevention, and complementing the programmes of the IADB and the OAS, UNICEF, with the support of the Department of Defense of the United States of America and the DC Comics company, published a comic strip early this year called "Superman and Wonder Woman: The Hidden Killer" in order to promote awareness of the dangers of anti-personnel mines and to teach the children of Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica how to deal with the problem. Thousands of these comic strips were distributed to support UNICEF programmes for mine-endangered peoples in those three countries. Other activities directed towards children in those countries were the production of videos, radio programmes and puppet shows.

These programmes are designed to prevent accidents caused by anti-personnel mines and other explosives, to inform and educate the most affected local populations regarding the problems of mines. These programmes are also designed to teach children about the dangers of mines, to bring about changes in their behaviour, to train them to transmit these messages to the rest of the family and to teach them how to avoid accidents involving anti-personnel mines.

Recently, the Nicaraguan Red Cross and UNICEF signed a cooperation agreement to finance a "child to child programme", whose purpose is to prevent accidents involving anti-personnel mines in five departments of Nicaragua. The "child to child programme" includes training for 23,000 minors in Matagalpa, Jinotega, Nueva Segovia and Madriz in the prevention of accidents involving explosive devices. Fifteen young teachers will receive training in teaching accident prevention to minors. They will be the disseminators of preventive experience. In Nicaragua there remain some 85,000 anti-personnel mines laid during the war in the 1980s. This campaign began last year in training workshops in various locations in the northern part of Nicaragua.

The problem of mines has worsened in Central America as a consequence of hurricane Mitch, and we can foresee certain effects of the heavy rains on minefields. First, mines laid in high terrain may have been moved from their original location by the torrential rains; this makes it necessary to explore new areas to detect mines and reduce the risks of accident. Secondly, mines sown in lowlands may have been concealed by a heavy layer of garbage, vegetation or mud. Thirdly, mine-clearance operations will become slower and more dangerous, since the positions of mines are unknown after the hurricane. Fourthly, the possibility of large areas being littered with mines has increased because of the flooding of mined bridges and their foundations. Mines have moved downstream at random until being stopped by some type of obstacle. Fifthly, many topographical markings have been lost, markings that facilitated the approximate locating of minefields for those who had inventory records. In addition, many roads no longer exist. Sixthly, and consequently, mine clearance will be more costly because more equipment of all kinds, including helicopters for evacuation, will be required.

These difficulties, caused by hurricane Mitch, may be responsible for the facts that, first, mine-clearance programmes in Central America may be unable to be completed on schedule; secondly, mechanized equipment, such as rollers attached to light minesweepers, may be needed to certify that mines have been removed from such areas as slopes of over 30 degrees, bridges, electric

pylons and river-banks; thirdly, the use of mine-detecting dogs may need to be assessed; and fourthly, educational campaigns may need to be stepped up among the people, especially among peasants, in order to lessen the risks of mine-related accidents. Mine-clearance programmes will also need to be redrafted, defining new schedules and necessary resources.

Among the experts whom France sent to help rescue people in danger in northern Nicaragua were some specializing in mines. We are grateful for that gesture, since at least one child in our country was killed by a mine that had been moved by water currents from its original emplacement.

The speed with which the ratification process was completed for the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, signed in Ottawa, and its consequent early entry into force on 1 March 1999 demonstrate the will and determination of Governments to put a quick end to the scourge of landmines plaguing mankind. The Central American countries and the Dominican Republic are sincerely pleased that its provisions will soon be in force. Our countries have either ratified or are in the final stages of ratifying the Ottawa Convention.

Our countries support the Governments of Canada and Mexico in the initiative of a regional seminar, soon to be convened in Mexico City, aimed at declaring the western hemisphere a zone free of anti-personnel landmines. We hope that, in the early years of the coming decade, we will see our Earth forever freed of anti-personnel landmines.

Mr. Lee (Republic of Korea): Allow me at the outset to express my delegation's appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his comprehensive report on assistance in mine clearance, contained in document A/53/496. My thanks also go to members of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and to those of the United Nations Mine Action Service in particular, who have played an active role in coordinating mine-action activities and developing a comprehensive mine-action strategy.

Since the end of the cold war, frequent outbreaks of internal conflicts have made many States infested with anti-personnel landmines. The impact of anti-personnel landmines extends beyond the immediate danger to lives and property to a wide array of socio-economic and development aspects in the mine-affected countries. It is also highly deplorable that the presence of anti-personnel landmines has posed formidable obstacles to post-conflict peace-building efforts, such as the return of refugees, humanitarian aid operations, reconstruction and economic development, and the restoration of normal social conditions. Hence, my Government has fully joined the call for concerted global action to eliminate the enormous human and material loss that continues to be caused by the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines.

In this regard, my Government welcomes the progress made so far in promoting the common cause of mine action. Given the sheer number of landmines strewn over the globe and their formidable clearance costs, mine action is truly a global agenda that requires an integrated and holistic approach. It is therefore encouraging to see the international community accelerate its efforts with a view to achieving the goal of zero victims within years, not decades.

Various international conferences, workshops and symposiums held this year have made a valuable contribution to the identification of relevant issues as well as to agenda-setting for global mine action. In particular, the Ottawa Workshop on Mine-Action Coordination last March and the Washington Conference on Global Humanitarian Demining last May served to deepen understanding of this issue and forge a global strategy. We also commend the outcome of the International Workshop on Demining and Victim Assistance held in Phnom Penh last month.

As demonstrated by the substitution of mine clearance by mine action, addressing mine contamination goes far beyond mine clearance. In coping with this multifaceted problem, my delegation considers that the United Nations should play a key role in coordinating various efforts at the national, regional, global and non-governmental levels in a timely and effective way. In this connection, we welcome the establishment of the United Nations Mine Action Service as a focal point for mine action within the United Nations system and we appreciate its collaboration and coordination with United Nations agencies and programmes for all mine-related activities. The Secretary-General's effort to develop a comprehensive mine-action strategy is also crucial to the effective and efficient accomplishment of the goal of zero victims.

Equally important is the willingness and readiness of the mine-infested countries to build their indigenous capacity in partnership with the international community.

No outside assistance can take effect without genuine self-help efforts. In this respect, we believe that more resources must be allocated to the capacity-building of the mine-affected States in the long-term perspective, such as the training of personnel and the enhancement of mine awareness. We also consider it desirable for donor countries to pursue sustainable mine action in the context of development assistance in the long-term perspective.

In the same vein, my delegation wishes to underline the importance of country-specific programmes adapted to local situations in taking action against mine contamination. Despite the need for a global approach in certain areas, mine action should be basically country-specific, in the light of the diverse capabilities and environments of affected States. Regional or subregional approaches can also play a role in complementing specific country programmes.

In the wake of its bitter experience of high civilian casualties during the Korean War, the Republic of Korea has been one of the staunchest adherents to the basic principles of international humanitarian law. Our concern for the elimination of the scourge of anti-personnel landmines is not an exception. In line with the international community's concern over the suffering and costs caused by the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines, my Government declared last year its intention to indefinitely extend the export moratorium that it has annually adopted since 1995 and has carried out faithfully. Furthermore, we are making every effort to complete the domestic procedure for accession to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and its amended Protocol II soon.

Though my country is at present not in a position to subscribe to the total ban on the use of anti-personnel landmines, due to its unique security situation, we will be able to accede to the Ottawa Convention if and when a durable peace mechanism is established on the Korean peninsula or a viable alternative to anti-personnel landmines is developed. In our view, the most urgent and realistic task before us is a total ban on the transfer of anti-personnel landmines. My Government supports the early start of negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament on a legal instrument governing the ban of the transfer of anti-personnel landmines. Such an inclusive and incremental approach deserves serious attention, since the landmines being strewn over conflict areas are mostly imported ones.

In spite of the unique situation that prevents my country from subscribing to a total ban on anti-personnel landmines, we fully share the common cause for global mine action. In this spirit, my Government has made financial contributions to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance since 1996. This year we have already disbursed our contributions for mine action in Cambodia, Tajikistan and Ethiopia. My country has also actively participated in the Mine Action Support Group as a donor country and will continue to do so.

The "zero victim goal" is a daunting task for the international community. Incessant internal conflicts continue to contaminate new territories with landmines, due to their inexpensive and easy accessibility. In recent years, however, concerted global efforts propelled by a committed political will have made considerable progress towards this end. We firmly believe that mobilization and coordination for mine action with the United Nations as a focal point will enable us to continue such steady progress. To conclude, my Government reaffirms its commitment to the common cause of mine action and will continue to play a constructive role in this humanitarian endeavour.

Mr. Shen Guofang (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): The Chinese Government has always paid much attention to humanitarian concerns in connection with the question of landmines and is very concerned at the indiscriminate maiming and killing of innocent civilians by landmines. We therefore appreciate the work of the Secretary-General. The United Nations is playing a very important role in this regard, and we welcome the establishment of the Mine Action Service in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and we hope that as a United Nations liaison office for system-wide mine-clearance activities it will play a larger role in assisting demining work.

China has maintained that appropriate and reasonable limits should be placed on the use and transfer of landmines, on the basis of the principle that this should not undermine countries' legitimate rights to self-defence and the security. We also believe that efforts should be made to eliminate the indiscriminate maiming and killing of innocent civilians by landmines.

To reach this goal, work should be done in the following three areas. First, regarding appropriate and reasonable limits on the use of landmines, China actively participated in the amendment negotiations on the

landmine Protocol to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and deposited its instrument of ratification of the new landmine Protocol with the Secretary-General a few days ago.

Secondly, regarding effective control of the transfer of landmines, in accordance with the landmine Protocol but long before its entry into force, China pledged not to export any anti-personnel landmines in violation of the provisions of Security Council resolutions on arms embargoes. We will continue to make efforts in this area.

Thirdly, in the area of strengthening international demining work, the Chinese Government has actively participated in international demining activities to prevent, or to promote the elimination of, threats to innocent civilians posed by landmines left from wars throughout the world. In November 1997, President Jiang Zemin of China solemnly declared that China would continue its active support for international mine-clearance efforts and cooperation, including by contributing to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance and providing assistance in the areas of demining training, technology and equipment.

Many areas of China have been hit by the worst floods of the century, and the cost of fighting the floods and carrying out disaster relief work has created enormous additional financial burdens for the Chinese Government. Despite this, the Chinese Government has formulated its own international mine-clearance assistance programme and is ready to provide, within its capacity, assistance to countries heavily affected by mines. The substance of the programme is as follows. First, a donation will be made this year in the amount of $100,000 to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund earmarked for demining activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Secondly, two training courses will be held on mine clearance in 1999 and 2000 in cooperation with the relevant United Nations departments to provide demining technology training to countries heavily affected by landmines. Thirdly, mine-detection and mine-clearance equipment will be contributed to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for use by those countries participating in China's training programme.

We believe our international mine-clearance programme will be successfully implemented through joint efforts between China and the relevant United Nations departments. As always, China will support international mine-clearance efforts to clear land and provide some peace and tranquillity to mine-affected countries. We support the thrust of the draft resolution and, having actively participated in the consultations on it, we are ready to join the consensus.

Mr. Hughes (New Zealand): A little more than a year after the Ottawa Convention was opened for signature, it is pleasing to note that the pace of the Ottawa process has continued and that the Convention will enter into force in March next year. I am pleased to report that New Zealand has nearly completed the domestic requirements for ratification. It is most important that Member States that have not yet done so should sign and ratify the Ottawa Convention as soon as possible.

An enormous task still lies ahead. Like many others, New Zealand has continued to participate in the rounds of international meetings this year, including those held in Ottawa, Washington and Phnom Penh. The high levels of support and commitment for mine action displayed at such gatherings by an increasingly large and diverse number of participants are most encouraging.

There are a number of concerns, however. If we are to make real progress in mine action, the great number of international meetings and workshops and the range of actors in international mine action must be coordinated effectively. Greater capacity for such coordination is needed. If an effective role is not taken on by the United Nations in this respect, an opportunity will be missed, and the goal of total mine clearance by 2010 will be that much harder. It is pleasing to note, therefore, the publication of "Mine action and effective coordination: United Nations policy". We think it entirely fitting, indeed imperative, that the United Nations actively place itself at the heart of international demining coordination efforts.

In order for the United Nations to undertake such a key role, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Mine Action Service must be adequately funded and staffed. We are particularly concerned that the handover period from gratis personnel to permanent staff must not cause a disruption to operational capacity or a loss of institutional memory. Member States and the Secretariat must ensure that at this critical time the United Nations has the capacity to adopt the central coordinating role that the international community requires of it. The establishment of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action and the Steering Committee on Mine Action, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report (A/53/496), represents helpful progress.

New Zealand has continued to work in the field in 1998, contributing to mine clearance work in Angola, Mozambique, Laos and Cambodia. We have also continued to provide financial support to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance, the Cambodian Mine Action Centre and the Laos unexploded-ordnance programme.

Over the years that New Zealand has been involved in demining, since its first contribution to Afghanistan in 1989, the New Zealand Defence Force has built up a substantial body of practical demining expertise, including training and mine- awareness education. We are giving careful consideration to ways of continuing to put this expertise to good use in the future.

It is of great concern to note that despite the continuing efforts and commitment of the international community to demining in Angola, demining is taking place alongside the renewed conflict in that country. This situation in Angola provides disturbing evidence that we still have a long way to travel. New Zealand is therefore pleased to co-sponsor the draft resolution before us. Adoption by consensus again this year will be a welcome reaffirmation of our collective determination, despite setbacks, to realize the objectives of the Ottawa Convention.

Mr. Granovsky (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): The problem of humanitarian demining has recently become more pressing. The Russian Federation has traditionally attached particular importance to the whole range of problems related to demining and dealing with the dangerous consequences of mines, which hinder the social and economic reconstruction of conflict-affected countries and urgent humanitarian tasks in that context.

We recognize the prohibition of the production, use, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines as the ultimate objective of concerted international efforts. It is of particular importance at this stage, to our way of thinking, to secure the maximum participation of members of the world community in the updated Protocol II, the so-called landmine Protocol, of the Inhumane Weapons Convention of 1980, and absolute and unequivocal adherence to the norms and standards introduced by it. The documents needed for its ratification have been introduced in Russia's State Duma, and we hope that in the immediate future we will be able to give legal form to our participation in that Protocol.

We clearly realize the humanitarian component of the acute mine problem, and we view international cooperation on demining as an important component of the complex task of post-conflict settlement. We are convinced of the urgency of the task of enhancing the efforts of the international community aimed at a fuller mobilization of the capacities of States of the United Nations in demining. In this light, we consider improved coordination of the activities of the various United Nations organs in carrying out demining programmes particularly pressing. We welcome the establishment of the United Nations Mine Action Service within the Secretariat's Department of Peacekeeping Operations. On the whole, to our way of thinking, all of the conditions exist to ensure that the United Nations will play the necessary leading role in coordinating the technical cooperation and assistance in harnessing national potential in demining.

In the near future we hope to see considerable contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance set up by the Secretary-General. In that way, the Fund will be able to play more fully its leading role in financing scientific research programmes in the field of humanitarian demining, in training of specialists and in informing populations about precautions that can reduce the dangers of mines.

Overcoming mine danger in zones of regional conflict is still a pressing task. Demining is increasingly becoming an integral part of peacekeeping operations. Where necessary, it must be included in the mandate of United Nations missions. In this connection, it has been repeatedly recognized that in the context of peacekeeping operations, the problem of landmines is particularly acute. United Nations forces are often deployed in places where a serious mine danger exists, and this jeopardizes the ability of the United Nations to carry out effectively its peacemaking function and hinders the cantonment and demobilization of troops, the accompaniment of humanitarian convoys and so on. Similarly, the threat of mines sometimes prevents humanitarian missions from carrying out appropriate operational activities.

For Russia, the questions of interaction with the United Nations, the exchange of information and technical, financial and material cooperation are of tangible, practical significance. Even though Russia itself needs financial assistance in solving the complex and expensive tasks that face it — tasks linked to demining and to peacemaking activities in a number of the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States —

we would nevertheless be ready to participate in providing demining assistance to countries in need of it on a multilateral or bilateral basis, first and foremost in the training of specialists for finding and disarming mines and in the provision of demining equipment. We have built up substantial scientific, technical and industrial capacity and expertise in the field of demining, which could be fully mobilized for future international programmes in this field.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At the outset I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his important report on progress in assistance in mine clearance and on the activities of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance.

The importance given to this question since 1993 by the General Assembly, and the importance attributed to the question by the international community as a whole, shows how serious the problem of mines is. It must be dealt with globally in all of its aspects and dimensions.

I might also mention at the outset that the title of the draft resolution before us does not conform to the title of the item that has been on the agenda of the General Assembly for five years. I think the title of the General Assembly draft resolution should be brought into line with the agenda item, to read "Assistance in mine clearance".

There is no doubt that the use of all kinds of mines is a very serious threat to the lives of thousands of people throughout the world and creates political, economic, environmental and social problems for a number of States all over the world.

It is necessary here to quote from the conclusion of the Secretary-General's report:

> "Mine action is indeed about people. It is about giving them the opportunity to live in an environment free from the physical, socio-economic and psychological entrapments caused by these callous and indiscriminate killers." (*A/53/496, para. 213*)

I also wish to quote from the conclusion of the Secretary-General's report of last year:

> "it is time to define the extent and breadth of the mine problem once and for all. A more precise global assessment of the mine problem is needed, based on the most inclusive possible range of factors, including the political, humanitarian, developmental, economic and security-related." (*A/52/679, para. 111*)

More specifically, and against this background, Egypt strongly believes that the huge financial and technological burdens associated with demining must not be borne solely by countries infested with these mines. Most often these countries are but the victims of mines and need financial and technological assistance for mine action. For this reason, Egypt holds to the view that the United Nations and its bodies and specialized agencies should give special priority to the developing countries affected by mines.

In the light of the foregoing, I would like to briefly address the problem of landmines in Egypt. This problem is due to the presence of nearly 23 million landmines scattered throughout more than 288 square kilometres of Egyptian territory. This constitutes a great impediment to the development of that area. Egypt is the country with the largest number of mines. A majority of these mines were placed during the famous battle at El Alamein, which took place in October and November 1942. Egypt's concern, and the concern of other countries which find themselves faced with this problem, is due to the fact that assistance received for demining is inadequate and not at all in keeping with the enormous task that must be undertaken for mine clearance.

The Egyptian authorities have already taken action within their limited technological and financial resources. Egypt has begun to implement an ambitious plan to free Egyptian soil of all landmines planted by the opposing forces during the Second World War. The implementation of this programme began in July 1991, and the year 2006 has been set as the target date for the completion of this arduous task. It is a very costly task, requiring great expertise. In this context I would like to stress the following: first, the implementation of this plan creates enormous technological and financial burdens that the Egyptian Government cannot afford to shoulder alone. Secondly, there is a pressing need for all States that have infested Egyptian territory with their mines to give specific information and precise maps to the Egyptian Government regarding the location of the mines. Thirdly, the cost of demining has risen due to the clear fact that many of these mines are buried under thick layers of sand that has shifted over the years. This has resulted in mines being buried more than seven metres deep. Fourthly, the presence of this huge number of mines over a large land area is obviously an obstacle to efforts by the Egyptian Government to develop its natural resources. The landmines stand in the way of the Egyptian Government's development efforts in the Sinai and the western Sahara. Fifthly, although the mines are

a mixture of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, they both cause human casualties which our conscience cannot ignore.

The report of the Secretary-General on this item indicates that responsibility for anti-personnel mine activity has now been shifted from the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Nonetheless, the report emphasizes in paragraph 34 that the main responsibility for demining action rests with the Governments of the affected States. The delegation of Egypt does not agree with that statement. It regrets the inclusion of such statements in the Secretariat's reports, which reflect a disengagement from the concerns of the countries infested with mines.

I am happy to refer to the statement made today by the representative of Austria, who, speaking today on behalf of the European Union, clearly reaffirmed this view in his statement. I would like to quote from that statement as follows:

(*spoke in English*)

> "action lies with the parties responsible for the laying of mines". (*supra*)

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The delegation of Egypt hopes that this time that view will be heard and that the Mine Action Service, as the focal point in this regard, will give due attention to this problem. We trust that this will be the case and that that service will rectify the mistaken approach taken to the problem, which has already been corrected by successive African summits, and even by the Review Conference on the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which recognized the responsibility of those States that laid the mines on the territories of other countries.

Moreover, I feel that it is important to highlight another matter which relates to the four aspects of the anti-personnel mine problem mentioned in paragraph 3 of the report. I must state for the record that the instrument dealing with the comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines is the Ottawa Convention. Despite the positive and speedy international response from a large number of our States that have signed and ratified that Convention, and the fact that these States associate themselves with the humanitarian goals that underpin that Convention and appreciate the great role played by the Government of Canada in this regard, several States, including Egypt have many reservations regarding the Ottawa Convention. The reservations stem from the reasons already presented, which require more comprehensive consideration by the competent international body, the Conference on Disarmament. This is due to several considerations relating to national security, especially as regards countries with long borders which they are incapable of defending except by means other than the use of mines, until an alternative is found.

For all these reasons, and in the light of the vote which took place on the draft resolution in the First Committee this year, we believe it appropriate to encourage mine action in those countries that have reservations regarding the Ottawa Convention. This would constitute an attempt to address these countries' concerns. The various dimensions on which this action is based must be reconsidered by the Secretariat, from which ample explanations and clarifications are required.

In conclusion, the Egyptian delegation would like to thank the Mine Action Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Egypt reaffirms its readiness to cooperate fully with the United Nations with a view to attaining the ultimate objective, which is the demining of all States where these mines were planted.

Mr. Khan (Pakistan): At the outset, my delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the activities being undertaken by the United Nations on mine clearance.

In Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia, Iraq, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Somalia, landmines have caused social and economic havoc. Today, Afghanistan alone has almost 10 million mines scattered all over the country. Thousands of Afghan refugees maimed by landmines have been treated in hospitals and rehabilitation centres in Pakistan. We continue to host more than 1.5 million Afghan refugees, and in many cases the refugees cannot return simply because of the landmines problem afflicting their country.

Pakistan is acutely aware of the problems caused by the indiscriminate use of landmines, and, in this context, our contribution towards demining operations the world over has been second to none. Our active role in demining operations in Kuwait, Angola and, more recently, Bosnia reflect our commitment to the international efforts being undertaken to deal with the menace caused by the indiscriminate use of mines.

Similarly, Pakistan has also declared a moratorium on the export of landmines, in effect since 1997.

We have noted with interest the designation of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations as the focal point within the United Nations system for mine clearance, and we continue to follow closely the evolution and strengthening of the United Nations Mine Action Service. It is our hope that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations will carry out its new mandate successfully.

However, we do not entirely agree with the explanation of the concept of mine action as contained in the Secretary-General's report. In our view, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations simply does not have the mandate to deal with

> "advocacy to stigmatize the use of landmines and support a total ban on anti-personnel mines." *(A/53/496, para.8)*

In our opinion, the disarmament aspect of this issue should be handled by other competent forums of the United Nations system.

It is encouraging to note that the international community is now becoming increasingly aware of the misery and destruction caused by the indiscriminate use of landmines. In recent years, concerted efforts have been made to clear unexploded mines and to alleviate the sufferings of landmine victims. Governmental and non-governmental organizations have launched campaigns to provide resources and technology for mine-clearing operations. The United Nations has played an important role in sensitizing the general public and in generating resources for mine clearance operations.

Despite these encouraging developments, efforts of the international community to deal with this problem have not been adequate. One area which needs urgent attention is the provision of sufficient resources for mine-clearance operations. In our view, the contributions made to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance have been far from sufficient. The response to requests for in-kind contributions to establish a stand-by United Nations landmine clearing capability has been lukewarm. As the mine-clearing operations require a continuous flow of resources, voluntary contributions alone would not be sufficient to effectively address this issue.

At the present pace of clearing 100,000 landmines per year, it would take many decades to overcome this crisis. We therefore need to pool our resources as well as enforce regulations to ensure universal adherence to existing multilateral instruments on the indiscriminate use of landmines. We also need to explore possibilities of establishing international mechanisms that call upon the States responsible for using mines indiscriminately to pay for mine-clearing operations.

My delegation would like to draw the attention of the international community to the continuing destruction caused by landmines left behind by occupation forces in Afghanistan. While the Secretary-General's report mentions that the mine-clearance target in Afghanistan was exceeded by 15 per cent, we feel that it is far below what is actually required. At the present rate it would require at least another decade to clear even the remaining high-priority mined areas, let alone to demine the whole country.

It is thus obvious that a far more intensive effort has to be made to rid the country of residual mines in the next two to three years. In our opinion, the great interest and awareness in the international community on the mine-clearance issue should be translated into action in Afghanistan.

Pakistan played an active role in the negotiations for the revised Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). We welcome the entry into force of the revised Protocol II in the near future. Pakistan is expeditiously taking steps to formally assume its responsibilities under the Revised Protocol II of the CCW. Steps now need to be taken to ensure universal adherence to the Convention and its Protocols. We believe that further measures could be considered in relevant multilateral forums to address the problems arising out of the indiscriminate use of landmines.

Mr. Ahmed (Sudan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): My delegation has read with interest the report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine clearance (A/53/496). My delegation would like to pay tribute to the strenuous efforts of the United Nations system in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and other parties that are working to spare humanity this scourge.

My country is one of those where mines have been planted. They were planted in our country in the Second World War, and then in the insurgency of 1955. Since 1983 mines have been laid indiscriminately on our land by the insurgent movement.

Approximately 3 million mines and unexploded devices of over 42 different kinds have been planted so far, covering large areas of southern Sudan. Destructive hands have also sown this terror in some of our eastern territory. Thus, the Sudan is considered one of the African countries most adversely affected by mines.

My Government tried seriously to lessen the adverse effects and potential catastrophes of this huge number of mines. We established the Sudan Mine Action Service, which is one of the main subsidiary organs of the Commission on Humanitarian Assistance. The programme concentrates on coordinating efforts and activities by international and regional organizations that are intending to provide technical or financial assistance in clearing mines from all areas affected by mines in the Sudan. The programme aims at training and rehabilitating mine victims as well as undertaking awareness and advocacy campaigns and ultimately clearing the mines from infested areas.

The great number of mines laid by the insurgency has adversely affected development in my country. Landmines left over 700,000 disabled persons who have lost their limbs due to mines. An equal number have been killed while the United Nations has been trying to ban this treacherous weapon and to assist countries affected by it, as is set forth in the report of the Secretary-General.

The report also mentions that regional offices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations were asked to gather information on the local situation of countries affected by landmines and to assess their effect on the agricultural sector. My country is one in which the population depends primarily on agriculture. As a result of the presence of a great number of mines, people cannot pursue their agricultural activities even in areas where peace has been re-established. That is why sending a mission to the Sudan, such as has been done in the case of other countries, is welcome in the context of coordinated efforts by the United Nations to combat this problem.

In this connection, we would like to mention that last year the United Nations sent an assessment mission to evaluate the scope of the mine problem in Sudan. We hope that more progress will be achieved in this respect through positive actions to mitigate the dangers of landmines and their adverse effects on development and stability.

We welcome the United Nations plan to dispatch missions to carry out level 1 surveys as described in the report of the Secretary-General to identify the actual scope of the mine problem. We hope that this programme will include our country, which is a signatory of the Ottawa Treaty, which will enter into force in March 1999. This emphasizes our keen interest in ridding the Sudan of the scourge of mines and from the threat to our citizens, many of whom have been maimed by these indiscriminate weapons. The United Nations has been steadfastly impartial and neutral and has given priority to the most vulnerable groups, and has made assistance to countries contingent on their commitment to support mine action.

My country conforms to these conditions. It is the insurgents who lay mines in our country. They are intransigent, and insist on laying more mines; they are not a party to the Ottawa Convention and have turned a deaf ear to all appeals for peace and for laying down their arms. Laying landmines is also a form of terrorism. Landmines are indiscriminate, and target innocent civilians. States that are supplying the insurgents with such weapons are themselves practicing State terrorism where indiscriminate mines are the equivalent of Tomahawk missiles. That is why the international community's adoption of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction should be followed up with agreement on international norms that would counter States that would impose their hegemony, based on selectivity, double standards and unilateral action.

In conclusion, we once more renew our commitment to the Ottawa Convention and call on the international community to coordinate efforts to eliminate the danger of landmines throughout the world.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): Questions relating to mine-clearance and the destruction of anti-personnel and other types of mines are matters of special concern for my Government. Croatia, being one of the world's eight most severely mine-affected countries, has in recent years placed great emphasis both on its internal obligations and on international efforts in demining and assistance to the victims of mines. Croatia is well aware of the suffering and pain caused by landmines, including also their social and psychological side effects. Large tracts of uncleared mines cannot but have an adverse affect on efforts at reconstruction, economic development, social reintegration and reconciliation.

Over one million mines lie scattered over 6,000 square kilometres of Croatia's territory. Their effect on efforts aimed at returning affected areas to normalcy, especially with regard to the return of refugees and

economic recovery and prosperity, cannot be overemphasized. The effect mines have on the process of return of refugees and displaced persons in Croatia has been elucidated by the Secretary-General and need not be expounded here. Suffice it to say that from 1995 to 1996 there were 580 victims of mines in Croatia, 102 of whom were children. With continued emphasis by the international community on the return of refugees and displaced persons in Croatia, these numbers are likely to rise. Let me take this opportunity to stress that the mine problem in Croatia does not affect all of its territory. It is confined to clearly defined areas on and along former lines of conflict. Although tourist destinations are far from danger areas, the awareness that there are many mines scattered somewhere in the country has a detrimental effect on this very important aspect of the Croatian economy.

Although Croatia appreciates the international assistance received thus far with regard to mine-clearance, we are well aware that it represents a mere fraction of the pressing needs. I do not wish to take away from national commitments and mine-clearance efforts, but these needs can only be fully addressed if the international community upholds its commitment and determination to assist the countries most affected, financially or in kind. Until recently, all mine-clearance in Croatia was conducted by the military and special police, or the State demining agency, MUNGOS. That situation has now changed, and mine legislation in Croatia now enables the Croatian Mine Action Centre (CROMAC) to award contracts to outside agencies. Projects for mine-clearance are approved by CROMAC, and invitations to bid on these projects are advertised. The Croatian Government is financing the overwhelming majority of these projects — over 95 per cent — and the Government has earmarked a further $10 million on top of the regular budget for demining projects. Due to the constant mines burden we face, we encourage international donors to participate by funding projects managed by CROMAC.

Since 1996, little international funding has been provided to assist Croatia in demining. We therefore highly appreciate donations by the Governments of Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Belgium and the United Kingdom, as well as by the European Commission and the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance. I should like especially to applaud the recent decision by the European Union Council of Ministers to grant ECU 435,000 for specific mine-removal programmes in Croatia for 1998. Croatia welcomes the Union's intention to send experts from the Western European Union, who will be entrusted with coordinating, supervising and training new Croatian demining teams. I should also like to take this opportunity once again to thank the Secretariat and those Member States that have made United Nations technical assistance to Croatia possible.

It is in this context that Croatia associates itself with the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Croatia participated in the Ottawa process from the beginning and was among the first 40 countries to ratify the Convention. We highly appreciate the special role that the Government of Canada and the Governments of Austria and of Norway have played in this process. Croatia is looking forward to the first meeting of States parties to the Convention, and welcomes the offer by the Government of Mozambique to host the conference in Maputo. Croatia believes that the conference will give States, especially small and medium-sized States, the opportunity to streamline their obligations to the Convention. In this regard we attach great importance to a well coordinated and effective preparatory process. Croatia believes that it is important to sustain the unique synergy among Governments, international organizations and institutions and civil society during the preparatory process, and reiterates its belief that it is this synergy which made the Ottawa process such a gratifying precedent in multilateral negotiations.

Croatia strongly believes that the full impact of the Convention depends on its successful implementation. The implementation of all the obligations contained in the Ottawa Convention, such as the elimination of existing stockpiles and the identification of mine-affected areas, as well as assistance to the victims of mine- or ordnance-related explosions, will require the mobilization of far larger resources than have thus far been made available, and more effective and better coordination of international efforts. My delegation is concerned that too much emphasis is being placed on mine-related activities that have little or no impact on the actual demining process or on new activities in mine-affected countries.

Croatia looks to the follow-up of the Ottawa process as a catalyst for genuinely advancing mine action throughout the world. Based on our own experience, we firmly believe that more forceful action is required at the national, regional and global levels. This has to be coupled with the necessary funds to finance commercial demining as well as assistance in specialized equipment, training and in-kind personnel support to the most affected countries. Assistance is also needed in enhancing

the effectiveness of national capacities, including in determining the appropriate role of the military in humanitarian demining. The implementation of the Convention will be a particularly difficult challenge for mine-affected countries. They will have to implement the obligations of the Convention, which are many, complex and costly, and at the same time intensify mine-clearance activities and victim rehabilitation. Croatia believes that this issue deserves special consideration in the preparations for the follow-up programme to the Ottawa Convention.

Croatia will work hard with all countries to support the Ottawa Convention in its next phase. The Convention represents a promising framework for a comprehensive solution to the ongoing humanitarian crisis. We have to use it to the full extent possible. The draft resolution now under consideration on assistance in mine action could provide useful input to our deliberations on the preparatory process. The role of the United Nations in increasing international mine-related activities and cooperation remains indisputable, and we are looking forward to the continuing contribution of the United Nations Secretariat.

Mr. Nejad-Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): The issue of mine clearance has been of grave concern to the international community since the beginning of the current decade. Major efforts have been made by the United Nations, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and a number of countries to limit the impact of these concealed weapons on communities and to alleviate, and if possible avert, the suffering that their indiscriminate use causes to civilians and innocent people throughout the world.

In this respect, the Secretary-General, as illustrated in his report contained in document A/53/496, has undertaken commendable efforts in addressing this important issue. The Mine Action Service has been established under the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to work as an operative focal point within the United Nations system for all mine-related activities. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has set up a framework for coordination within the United Nations system and has fostered interaction between the United Nations system and the international community. We appreciate all these efforts, which contribute significantly to landmine-clearance activities.

Despite the accomplishments in the field of mine clearance, the lack of serious efforts towards improving mine-clearance technology and the lack of incentives for the transfer of new technologies to mine-affected developing countries remains a constant concern for the world community and in particular for the 60-plus mine-affected countries. The increasing number of civilian casualties and the ever-widening disruption of development programmes of contaminated territories are some of the most serious consequences of the unrestrained and indiscriminate use of landmines. Furthermore, victims of landmines become a financial burden on mine-stricken States and on their dwindling resources. This ominous trend must be reversed in the interest of humanity and international peace and security.

During the Iran-Iraq war, nearly 16 million landmines and unexploded devices were laid in Iran, covering more than 4 million hectares. For the past 10 years or so, we have been engaged in massive mine-clearance operations in order to enable displaced civilians to return to their homes and resume a normal life. We have succeeded in neutralizing and destroying about 6.2 million mines and unexploded devices by manual demining methods, though regrettably the mine-laying country did not provide us with maps and other records. I would stress that the mines laid in our previously occupied territories have taken huge expanses of our agricultural land out of production and rendered them uninhabitable. More importantly, during this period more than 1,500 people, whether involved in mine-clearance operations or simply innocent civilians living in those regions, have been killed, and more than 7,000 have been injured or maimed.

Efforts at mine clearance should be intensified if the international community is to reduce the number of casualties of landmines. The statistics are shocking. Every month more than 2,000 people are killed or maimed by landmines. The international community should mobilize every resource urgently to tackle this crisis, with a view to eliminating the threat of landmines to civilians as soon as possible. However, in our opinion, lack of resources is not the only reason hampering mine-clearance programmes; the absence of political will is also a factor. Indeed, political will on the part of the developed countries — which have the potential to contribute significantly to safer, faster and cost-effective mine clearance through the transfer of mine-clearance equipment and technology to infested countries — is all the more essential.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a country affected by millions of landmines, has participated in all international negotiations and supported all genuine initiatives that deal effectively with this category of weapons. We have declared a moratorium on the export

of anti-personnel landmines and expedited the process of accession to the strengthened Protocol II of the 1981 Convention on Conventional Weapons. However, our frequent requests for assistance in mine clearance have yet to receive a positive response from the developed countries, which command the required technology and equipment.

Improved technology means the cost-effective removal and destruction of landmines and, ultimately, the saving of lives. Therefore, serious attempts should be made to improve mine- clearance technology and to transfer new technologies to developing countries, particularly to mine-affected nations. The activities of the Mine Action Service are promising. In our view, it should also act as an international focal point for the planning and coordination of research on improved mine-clearance technology as well as on the transfer of technologies for mine clearance. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations needs to ensure that no restrictions are imposed by any State that would impede access to mine-clearance technology. At the same time, all States, particularly those which have the required technology and equipment for mine clearance, should inform the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the technical assistance they could provide to mine-affected countries and the relevant United Nations programmes.

It is absolutely clear that without concerted international efforts, the world cannot be emancipated from this problem. To this end, States that have laid mines in foreign territories should provide that information, including maps, records and documentation of landmines, to infested States. All States should comply with their obligations undertaken under international humanitarian law and accordingly stop indiscriminately deploying anti-personnel landmines. The international community should also intensify its endeavours to find an alternative means of defence that can replace anti-personnel landmines as soon as possible. The Conference on Disarmament should continue its work on this issue, seeking to negotiate a comprehensive instrument to address both the security and humanitarian aspects of landmines as well as the need to render technical and financial assistance to mine-affected countries.

It goes without saying that recipients should cooperate with the countries or organizations involved in mine-action services. At the same time, we firmly believe that assistance in mine clearance is a humanitarian requirement; where practically feasible it should not be linked to any other condition or commitment.

In conclusion, I would like to restate that my Government welcomes any assistance in mine clearance offered by the United Nations system as well as by non-governmental organizations and interested countries. As the report of the Secretary-General indicates, Iran is among those States that requested assistance in mine clearance. In this regard, last year we signed a pilot landmine clearance project with the United Nations Development Programme. We have also received a letter from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations regarding an assessment mission to estimate the gravity of landmine contamination in our territories. We welcome these initiatives and will cooperate with the aforementioned organizations.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Allow me to begin by joining previous speakers in expressing my delegation's thanks to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on assistance in mine clearance, as contained in document A/53/496. The report covers the mine-clearance activities undertaken by the United Nations system and reflects on our further work in mine clearance.

Mines and other unexploded ordnance resulting from armed conflicts continue to be a subject of deep concern to the international community. Today millions of mines and other unexploded ordnance remain scattered through and buried in over 60 countries of the world, and thousands of people are being killed and injured every year. These hidden killers not only are inflicting great suffering and death upon innocent populations, especially women and children, but also create tremendous obstacles to the economic and social development of the contaminated countries. Every effort should therefore be made to intensify international cooperation in the field of mine clearance. It is our belief that only through such concerted efforts can mankind be saved from this awful scourge.

As one of the world's most ordnance-contaminated nations, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is struggling hard to cope with the problems encountered. The 2 million tons of ordnance that fell on the country during the war remain buried in the soil or scattered on the surface and continue to cause injury or death to our innocent population. As a matter of fact, dropped at an estimated failure rate of 30 per cent, these tennis-ball sized bomblets — or "bombies", as we call them in our Lao language — still litter the hillsides, paddies and forests and indiscriminately strike their victims, including women and children.

According to the national survey conducted in cooperation with Handicap International, 13 of the 16 provinces, one prefecture — Vientiane — and one special zone — Saysomboune — in the county are contaminated with unexploded ordnance. Nearly 11,000 accidents have occurred since the end of the bombing in 1973, with the accident rate remaining consistently more than 200 per year. This is the equivalent of more than one accident killing or injuring innocent victims every two days. In nine months of 1998 alone, there were 68 accidents which killed 25 and injured 43 people. In both cases the majority of victims were children.

In order to address this multifaceted problem, the Lao Government has drawn up a comprehensive, multidimensional programme. Within the framework of our efforts, in 1994 a first unexploded-ordnance removal project was initiated by the Mines Advisory Group in Xieng Khouang, one of the most-affected provinces of Laos.

One year later, the Lao Government, with assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), established a Trust Fund for unexploded ordnance in order to finance a nationwide programme of unexploded-ordnance awareness and clearance. To date more than $5 million in cash and more than $8 million of in-kind contributions have been pledged to the Trust Fund by the United States, Luxembourg, Australia, the Netherlands, Norway, Canada, Sweden, Japan, Belgium, Finland, Germany, France, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the European Union, as well as other international and non-governmental organizations.

In 1996 the national unexploded-ordnance programme was elaborated. Known as UXO LAO, it has three main tasks: to create a national capacity for unexploded-ordnance activities; to prepare and implement a national unexploded-ordnance strategy and demining projects; and to coordinate unexploded-ordnance clearance, awareness and survey projects throughout the country.

The operations were first conducted in only three affected provinces. They were then expanded into an additional five provinces in 1997. As of quite recently, UXO LAO had already implemented programmes in nine affected provinces.

Although much remains to be done, some important achievements have been recorded. During the period from January to September 1998, over 207.61 hectares of land were cleared of unexploded ordnance, and a total of 33,059 of these devices were destroyed. In parallel, community awareness teams visited 246 villages and briefed over 65,600 people on the dangers of unexploded ordnance.

By and large, we have made good progress in the implementation of the Lao unexploded-ordnance programme. However, the safe and reliable enhancement of clearance productivity remains a challenging requirement, and more efforts ought to be made in the years ahead.

By the year 1999, if all goes according to plan, unexploded-ordnance offices will be established in all of the 13 affected provinces, the Vientiane prefecture and the Saysomboune special zone, and planning is under way to ensure that the structure is filled entirely by local staff, with each affected province having its own awareness and clearance capacity.

The overall annual resource mobilization target for 1998 is $15.8 million, to be received either as cash grants or as in-kind contributions, without which unexploded-ordnance operations will not be sustainable in the future. In order to attain this goal, the Lao Government, UNDP and UNICEF will continue their utmost efforts in resource mobilization, aimed at securing the necessary funding for existing programmes and ensuring the ongoing viability of the medium- and long-term programmes.

In conclusion, I would like to express our great appreciation to all donor countries and international and non-governmental organizations for their generous assistance in making the Lao unexploded-ordnance programme a reality. It is our fervent hope that the international community will continue to lend its support to our arduous effort to achieve the objectives as set out in the programme. The road is surely a hard and long one. But our country is at peace, and we are convinced that, through international cooperation and assistance, we will be able to make it.

Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino): I would like to express my sincere thanks to the delegation of Austria for presenting the draft resolution entitled "Assistance in mine action", co-sponsored by the Republic of San Marino.

Although not directly afflicted by this problem, my country is particularly concerned about the existing threat

of landmines for many innocent civilians, especially children. In recent years, instruments of war have become increasingly sophisticated and destructive. Landmines injure and kill indiscriminately, and they disproportionately affect the defenceless.

We deeply share the concern expressed by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "Assistance in mine clearance". The fact that more than 60 countries are directly at risk because of the potential destructive effects of these tools of massacre is frightening, and it calls for awareness, immediate attention and swift response. Despite the efforts of the United Nations system, regional organizations, Governments and non-governmental organizations, there is still the need for strong concerted action to eradicate the extensive use and destructive power of these tools.

Of the four complementary core components — all equally important — of the United Nations mine-action programme described in the Secretary-General's report, the Republic of San Marino gives particular emphasis to mine-awareness and risk-reduction education. Ignorance of the threat of landmines is still the main cause of their deleterious effects.

The San Marino National Commission for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is currently involved in a fund-raising campaign which will contribute to promoting mine-awareness education for Croatian children in primary and secondary schools.This is an important project that will need to be carried out very swiftly. In the coming months, we are planning to organize a huge campaign for public awareness. In Croatia there are still 120 million square metres of potentially mine-infested areas. We expect to raise approximately $50,000; considering the small size and limited population of our country, this is equivalent to $2 per person. This relatively small contribution is a way for the people of San Marino to express their commitment to a united effort to eliminate the hazards of landmines.

The Republic of San Marino was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. We welcome the fortieth ratification of the Convention, by Burkina Faso, which ensures its entry into force 1 March 1999. We appreciate Mozambique's offer to host the first meeting of the States parties to the Convention on its territory. This fast process of ratification confirms the awareness of Governments and countries of the magnitude of the landmine problem. Building a legal framework is one of the important steps for continuing our struggle against this cruel and powerful enemy.

Lastly, we would also like to stress that the fight against landmines starts with the fight against their production. We should not underestimate the importance of appealing to all countries with mine-producing industries to start a process of transforming those industries. We hope that more and more countries with the capability to do so will join us in contributing to actions leading to the total elimination of landmines and to proper attention to their past effects.

Ms. Coelho Da Cruz (Angola): My delegation has listened very attentively to previous statements, which underscored the importance of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations as the focal point of the United Nations system for all activities and issues related to demining efforts in countries affected by armed conflict.

Angola shares the concern of the international community on the use of anti-personnel landmines, which kill, maim and hinder reconstruction and development efforts and obstruct freedom of movement in post-conflict processes.

As members are aware, the National Institute for the Removal of Explosive Devices (INAROE) is the specialized government agency responsible for the coordination and execution of demining operations, working to ensure the resettlement of populations, the reinitiation of productive activities and the free circulation of people and goods. INAROE is working jointly with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to coordinate a national-awareness campaign on the danger of landmines and on the creation of programmes to be implemented in cooperation with the Ministries of Health, Education and Agriculture and the national media.

In spite of the internal situation in our country, the Government continues to respect its commitment to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. The Republic of Angola is today one of the countries in which the largest number of anti-personnel landmines can be found. There are over 10 million mines laid in Angolan territory. These mines have inflicted innumerable casualties and over 100,000 people have been mutilated.

The fact that Angola has not yet ratified the Ottawa Convention, in the preparatory phases of which we participated actively, does not imply indifference or a change of attitude vis-à-vis this scourge. The document is already before Parliament for ratification.

Unfortunately, the demining efforts conducted by the Government and the non-governmental organizations have been significantly reduced due to the deterioration of the military situation caused by UNITA's military wing. Several non-governmental organizations have suspended their activities for security reasons. This situation is affecting the humanitarian assistance efforts as well as interfering with the circulation of goods and people in some regions.

In addition to this situation, the military wing of UNITA is remining roads and agricultural lands. This has had a very negative impact on the socio-economic rehabilitation process. Civilian populations and social and economic workers are again feeling insecure and limiting their activities.

In spite of the difficulties faced in the execution of the demining effort, the major-access thoroughfares have been cleared and work has been initiated on secondary roads. The Government has not remained idle. It has continued to demine wherever possible and has intensified the mine-awareness campaign and the training of technical sapper brigades.

Although some progress has been registered, there are a number of priorities still pending due to the lack of resources for demining programmes. Moreover, the lack of improved mine detection and mine technology continues to be critical. If we want to prevent or reduce the tragedy of landmines and promote reconstruction and development in mine-infested countries, new and enhanced technology must be developed to expedite mine-clearance activities and increase their effectiveness.

My delegation fully supports paragraph 212 of the report and appeals to Member States and the international community to continue their support to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance and to create new and additional resources for this noble cause.

Draft resolution A/53/L.28 reflects the concern of the Member States on this important issue and stresses the need for coordinated efforts by the international community. My delegation is honoured to join the list of sponsors of the draft resolution and hopes that it will be adopted without a vote.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/53/L.28, entitled "Assistance in mine action".

I wish to inform the Assembly that, since the draft resolution was introduced, the following countries have become co-sponsors: Angola, Costa Rica, Jordan, Panama, Romania, Slovenia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan and Uruguay.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/53/L.28?

Draft resolution A/53/L.28 was adopted (resolution 53/26).

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to conclude its consideration of agenda item 42?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.